

Opening Address
Senator Charlie Shields, President Pro Tem
Second Regular Session, 95th General Assembly
January 6, 2010

Lt. Governor Kinder, members of the Missouri Senate, our families, friends, and people of Missouri:

On this day just a year ago, I was honored to be elected by you as president pro tem of this great legislative body. Today, I continue to be honored and grateful for the trust you have placed in me. For me and nine others, this day represents the last opening day where we will sit as members of the Missouri Senate.

For those of us who are leaving, it would be easy to use the next four and a half months to reflect on our legislative careers and accept all the appreciation and congratulations that come when one ends a career. And while that would be the easy thing to do, it would not be the right thing to do.

Our state is facing serious challenges: the second budget year in a row where we are working with less revenue than the year before, we need to get Missourians back to work in lasting and growing industries that pay well and offer benefits, and we must restore confidence in our elected officials with ethics reforms. We need all 34 Missouri Senators working together to meet these challenges.

As we have recognized those of us who are entering our twilight, I extend a warm welcome to our newest member – the senator from the 4th.

Senator, you now join a select few in your new journey as a state senator. We support you as you work to rebuild the faith the people of the Fourth District may have lost in our democratic process and elected leaders.

The career-ending mistakes made by three elected officials last year remind us we are all human, and therefore fallible. We are a body of everyday people chosen by the public. And as humans, mistakes are unavoidable. But we must strive for higher ethics standards, because ethics violations are unacceptable. They are unacceptable legally, morally and, most of all, because they can destroy the public's trust in our democratic process. And without their trust, democracy fails. All of us who hold the public's trust must address this issue this year.

That is why I have proposed that we once and for all put an end to even the appearance of pay-to-play politics. We must find a way to ban contributions from lobbyists during session as we tried several years ago. We must finally give teeth to the state's Ethics Commission by creating the role of an independent investigator and we must hold our staff to the same levels of accountability that we hold ourselves.

These are my ideas, but there are many more that have already been introduced. I welcome your input and seek help from all of you in this effort.

Our toughest challenge this year will be the budget. To date, our state's revenue is down by 10.6 percent, while it is estimated at the end of the fiscal year we will only be down by 6.4 percent or more than \$1 billion. It has also been forecast that growth will be below average in Fiscal Year 2011.

The good news is that last year we were prudent and reserved more than half - or \$1 Billion - of the state's federal stabilization money to use in the upcoming budget. But those dollars will run out.

We will have to make tough decisions to fund our priorities without a tax increase. And hear me, we will not raise taxes.

We are facing an on-going budget crisis and to succeed, we must have a governor who will do his job and present a balanced budget that is not short-sighted. Last fall, I asked Governor Nixon to join us in beginning an extended budget planning cycle. While state budgeting is done yearly, it is of the utmost

importance that every budget decision be made with the consideration of its impact on future years in mind. We must not be short-sighted. Cooperation is the key to providing necessary governmental services in a way taxpayers can afford.

The solution to our budget situation is to put people back to work in good-paying jobs with benefits. Our state's revenue is reliant on people working and participating in our economy.

We must focus on creating jobs to improve the economy and help Missouri families thrive. We must give the new Economic Development Director David Kerr the tools he needs to succeed in growing Missouri businesses and getting new businesses to relocate here. We must examine all ideas, including closing funds, innovative tax structures, and incentives for small businesses to keep and recruit better paying jobs with benefits.

Plus, we must recognize that the best economic development tool is an educated workforce. We must provide top-notch educational opportunities to our citizens – along the entire education spectrum.

Last year, Missouri's highest court recognized that we are giving our children, no matter where they live, an equal opportunity for a great education based on the funding formula we passed in 2005. The Supreme Court found that the formula, which is based on students' needs rather than local wealth, has a rational basis.

Since we created and passed the new formula, we have been dedicated to fully funding it. In the four years of the phase-in, we have increased K-12 funding by nearly \$450 million without a tax increase. This year, we must continue that commitment and make education a top budget priority.

We must also work to make sure that more of our students have an educational experience past high school. We must build on the programs we have passed to continue to make college affordable to as many Missouri students as possible. We must support new, innovative and specialized programs that

prepare our students to compete for quality jobs. And we must think outside the box for ways to help adults find their way back to the classroom for retraining.

In 1992, the voters of our state passed term limits for legislators, no more than 8 years in the House and 8 years in the Senate. Almost since the passage of that amendment, observers of state government have argued whether term limits are good or bad for our citizens and our state. Supporters argue term limits end the days of back room deals and cronyism while those against term limits say too much power and decision-making is shifted to staff and lobbyists.

I believe these are interesting arguments for political scientists, but unproductive arguments for those charged with making public policy. What I am proposing today is that we change the discussion from the merits versus frustrations of term limits to a discussion of how to make government work best for Missourians in a term-limited environment. Simply put, our terms may be limited to 8 years, but the way we think about our vision for Missouri's future should never be limited.

Last year when I spoke to you, I talked about how our state government is a \$23 billion organization operating without a long-term strategic plan. I challenged us to shift our way of governing from being reactionary and year-to-year to a way with vision and purpose. You answered that challenge and we created three committees designed to craft a vision of the kind of state Missouri can be in the year 2020 and the plan to get there.

I commend the work of our first-term members who serve on these committees and their chairmen – the senator from the 15th, the junior senator from St. Charles and the senator from Johnson County. To date, these committees have reviewed our current operations in the areas of job creation, healthcare and education; invited the public and gained their input in determining what our future goals should be; and have begun the arduous task of creating a long-term strategy for how we will get there.

This legislative session, I will propose legislation to make long-term planning a permanent part of the legislative process. We must always be thinking about the future for a better Missouri and have a plan on how we get there. We need a three-year plan, a five-year plan and, more importantly, a ten-year plan that will transcend our term limits.

Ten of us leave this year. The same will be true two years from now and this revolving door will continue to spin. Some have said term limits have given us a Senate with four years of “I don’t know” followed by four years of “I don’t care.” I propose the new view is eight years of long-term solutions for our future, so that we may all work to create a better Missouri for generations to come.

As I end today’s remarks, a quote from Woodrow Wilson comes to mind...

“You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.”

As Wilson said, let’s get to work.

Thank you.

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